



MEDIA RELEASE / Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers

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Pay Equity is a social justice issue

New Zealand's professional body for social workers, the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW), is questioning the Government over the 'anti-pay equity decision' taken last week by State Services Minister Tony Ryall when he axed two pay equity investigations on the basis they might generate calls for more pay.

"It appears that the Government is using the current world economic crisis as an excuse to not complete a piece of work to investigate a basic issue of social justice," says Rose Henderson, ANZASW President.

"It may be one thing to put a lid on pay expectations, but moving to quash the pursuit of a fundamental right such as pay equity, is simply not acceptable under any circumstances. It is especially concerning that the Minister has axed an investigation into pay equity for the mainly female workforce at Child Youth and Family, when female social workers are paid 9.5% less than their male counterparts".

"The high number of women within the Social Work profession should not lead to worse pay for women. This clearly warrants investigation to fully understand and to address the root causes - shutting down that opportunity is an extremely retrograde step to take".

"In addition, as the country enters a time of increasing social pressures on the frontline where Social Workers provide essential services, ANZASW believes that now is definitely not the time to be sending a message to female Social Workers that they are not valued by the Government".

"This decision appears contradictory to one of the roles that the State Services Commission has, which is to raise awareness of pay and employment equity issues. It also undermines the work of the Human Rights Commission, the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission and the EEO Trust. This makes a nonsense of Government's overarching policy for employment and workplace relations that is based on demonstrating good faith, natural justice, human rights, good employer practice and requirements, and relevant legislation. "

"ANZASW does not believe it is enough to say that departments will still be expected to continue to address equality issues when the Government is failing to take a leadership role on pay equity, and instead appears to be providing tacit support for maintaining the gender pay gap. In our view this does not match the Government's stated principle of being fair to employees"

"We will be asking the Minister to provide an explanation for his decision on the issue of pay equity for social workers. Our concern is that without a commitment to investigating pay equity, already existing problems in recruiting and retaining Social Workers could worsen. Today we note that the Minister has, wearing his Health portfolio hat, introduced the Voluntary Bonding Scheme for Doctors, Nurses and Midwives because of those very problems".

"This is not an issue that is going to disappear," says Rose Henderson. "For its part ANZASW will continue to advocate strongly for pay equity as a basic human rights issue, and in the current climate we will join with others in closely monitoring the impact of economic policies or legislative changes on human rights and social justice".

"On Human Rights Day in December, ANZASW issued a caution against any complacency that New Zealand's human rights record is as good as it can be, and we signaled that this year would put that record to the test. The question we asked then, and the question we ask now, is: What price human rights?"

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